

# County of San Luis Obispo

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO PROGRAM HONORED FOR INNOVATION

*Youth program helps former foster care students finish higher education*

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA—The County of San Luis Obispo was recently recognized by the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) in a statewide competition for its innovation and creativity in helping local youth formerly in the foster-care system meet their educational goals.

The County of San Luis Obispo was one of 29 California counties to receive a Merit Award from the 2014 CSAC Challenge Awards for its Transitional Age Youth Financial Assistance Program. These awards celebrate the innovative and creative spirit of California county governments as they find ways to provide unique and cost-effective programs and services to their citizens.

“This isn’t just a program that sends youth to college,” said Lee Collins, Director of the County’s Department of Social Services. “It is a program that saves lives. We are well aware of what can happen to foster youth when they simply age out of our system without help, and we will do everything in our power to make sure that these young people have every opportunity for a better life.”

Participants of the County’s program have a 70 percent college completion rate, compared to the 2 percent national average among foster youth, and success can be attributed to a combination of mentorship, guidance and financial assistance. Through the County’s Department of Social Services, the Transitional Age Youth Financial Assistance Program provides assistance with housing, transportation, school costs, school supplies and other critically urgent living necessities, such as groceries, utility assistance and furnishings. Eligible participants may also receive \$100 in savings match per month to encourage the start of an emergency fund, as well as mentor services and case management support.

According to a Chapin Hall Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth released in 2011, many former foster youth who dropped out of college cited problems including struggling to pay basic living expenses, such as rent and food, as well as school-related expenses that weren’t covered by grants and loans. Many also struggled to meet school expectations while working full time to support themselves. Recognizing the need for support locally, the County created its assistance program for local former foster youth to help them overcome those barriers, pursue a higher education and achieve their goals.

Since 2010, the County has partnered with Family Care Network – a foster family agency – using and redirecting realignment funds to assist former foster youth in achieving their college and vocational dreams. Program staff helps the participants – over 125 to date, and still increasing – apply for scholarships and grants to which they may be eligible, but staff never encourages youth to apply for student loans.

On average, each program participant receives \$4,600 per year in assistance, representing the gap between other financial resources and the students’ needs.

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